


MAHABALIPURAM



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MAHĀBALIPURAM

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Occupying an important place among the classical monuments in India, the monolithic and cave temples at Mahābalipuram (now known as Māmallapuram) attract the visitors from far and wide. Picturesquely situated close to the sea and rich in their artistic wealth, these monuments afford scope for not only the study of ancient architecture and sculpture in the Tamil country but also for enjoying a pleasant holiday.

Mahābalipuram (12°37'02'' N; 80°11'39'' E) is situated about fifty-nine km south of Chennai and can be reached from Chennai by East Coast Road, a toll road via Kovalam or by Old Mahābalipuram Road via Tirupporur. Mahābalipuram is a destination in the conducted trip of all tour operators, both private and Government. Those who want to use public transport may catch the regular bus services from Koyambedu Bus stand, Chennai. Various types of lodgings are available in plenty, from budget to luxury, regular lodgings to Beach resorts, run by private and Tourism Development Corporations. Facilities like restaurants, catering, different types of food

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are also available.

Once a sleepy village, now Mahābalipuram is a buzzing place. Nevertheless, the ancient tradition of stone carving is still alive here. The visitors can not only shop around but also witness the actual technique of stone carving, be it with some modern powered tools, or the rhythmic sounds of hammer and chisels.

UNESCO has inscribed these group of monuments in the World Heritage List. The monuments remain open between 08.00 hrs to 18.00 hrs. Entry fee is Rs. 10/- for Indians above fifteen years of age and US \$ 5 or Rs. 250/- for foreigners above fifteen years of age. Photography using still cameras without stand, with synchronised flash is permitted. Videography using hand held video cameras is permitted on paying a fee of Rs. 25/- as of now, after filling a simple form available at the ticket counters. Other forms of photo-graphy/videography require permission from the Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai Circle, Fort St. George, Chennai-600 009.

SHORT HISTORY

Ancient names of Mahābalipuram

MAHĀBALIPURAM HAS BEEN FAMOUS AS A SEA-PORT even from the beginning of the Christian era. A work called the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* by an unknown Greek navigator of the first century AD refers to it along with Poduke (modern Pondicherry) as a port north of the Kāverī. Ptolemy, a Greek geographer of the next century, refers to it as Malange. The occasional finds of Roman coins and pottery in the neighbourhood testify to its importance as a trading centre.

Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller of the seventh century, mentions Kāñchī as the sea-port of the Pallava rulers of south India, but this is an obvious mistake for Mahābalipuram, Kāñchī (modern Kanchipuram) being situated inland.

The modern name Mahābalipuram is derived from Māmallapuram, 'the city of Māmalla', a title of Narasimhavarman I (*circa* 630-70), the great Pallava ruler of the seventh century, who was responsible for most of the rock-cut temples and carvings at the place. But probably the name Mallai or even Māmallai was known earlier and used by early Vaishṇava saints. Another ancient name of the place was Kaḍalmallai referred to by the Vaishṇava saint Tirumangaiālvār, probably a contemporary of Nandivarman, one of the successors of Narasimhavarman; he gives a graphic description of the harbour with its anchored ships laden

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with treasure, huge elephants and the nine gems. As Mallai, the place is known to be the birth-place of Bhūtattālvār who preceded Tirumangaiālvār. Let it be said at once that the name Mahābalipuram is in no way connected with Mahābali, the mythical demon suppressed by the god Viṣṇu, nor with Mahābali dynasty which rose into prominence in south India in about the ninth-tenth centuries.

Of the early European travellers the first to be attracted by these monuments was Manucci, an Italian of the seventeenth century. The present popular name of 'Seven Pagodas', like the name 'Black Pagoda' for the Sun temple at Konārak, is due to the early Europeans in India and was originally applied to the Shore temple (below, p. 29) and the other temples a little inland, the spires of which could be seen from the sea; but local fishermen would have us believe that there were more temples on the shore itself that have gone under the sea within the past few centuries.

The Pallavas

The monuments at Mahābalipuram owe their origin to the Pallava rulers of south India, who came into existence in the third-fourth century and ruled from their capital at Kāñchī. From the beginning the Pallavas were a seafaring people who spread Hindu culture in the Indian Archipelago, where the early inscriptions are written in the Pallava-Grantha script and the sculptures show unmistakable affinity with south Indian Pallava culture. Mahābalipuram, the port of the

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Pallavas, must have played a great part in the propagation of the Pallava culture outside India.

In the first half of the seventh century the Pallavas suffered a reverse at the hands of the Chālukya monarch Pulakeśin II (609-642) who wrested the Telugu districts from them. The contemporary king Mahendravarman I (*circa* 600-30) had to be contented with a reduced territory extending over the Districts of Chingleput, North Arcot, South Arcot, Thanjavur, Tiruchchirappalli and parts of Salem and Chittoor. Originally a Jaina, Mahendravarman executed the cave-temple at Śittanavāśal (District Tiruchchirappalli) and embellished it with paintings, which are the best examples of Pallava brushwork. Later in his life he was converted to Śaivism by the saint Appar; with the zeal of a convert he studded the whole of his kingdom—particularly the Chingleput and North Arcot Districts with rock-cut Śiva temples. Particularly important is his rock-temple at Tiruchchirappalli, where a sculptured panel depicting Gaṅgādharamūrti is one of the most notable plastic achievements in India.

The name of Mahendravarman has come down in history not only as the pioneer of south Indian temple-architecture and painting but as a poet, dramatist and musician. The Maṇḍagapaṭṭu inscription describes him as a curious-minded king, who, discarding perishable materials like brick, timber, metal or mortar for constructing temples, scooped them out of the living rock. The great tank Mahendrataṭāka, one of the most famous irrigation tanks in south India, was excavated by him to help his subjects.

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His son Narasimhavarman I, surnamed Māmalla (*circa* 630-70), was an even greater figure than his father both in war and in peace and was one of the three great Indian rulers of the seventh century, the other two being Pulakeśin II of western and Harshavardhana of northern India. Aided by Mānavarman, the refugee-king of Sri Lanka, he inflicted a defeat on Pulakeśin and avenged his father's defeat. To help Mānavarman to regain his throne he sent a large fleet to Sri Lanka which must have started from Mahābalipuram. To his reign belong most of the monuments of Mahābalipuram.

Narasimhavarman II, also called Rājasimha (*circa* 690-715), associated with his queen Raṅgapatākā, built the Kailāśanātha temple at Kanchipuram, the best example of an early Pallava masonry temple. A subsequent king, Nandivarman (*circa* 717-779), was responsible for the other famous temple at Kanchipuram, the Vaikuṇṭha-perumāl. After him came a period of weak succession. The Pallava power was finally overthrown by the Chólas in the ninth century.

Architecture and sculpture

Mahendra style.—There is no extant example of masonry temples of the reign of Mahendravarman, all the monuments known to us being rock-cut, i.e., scooped out of the living rock. The pillar-inscription of Mahendravarman from Kanchipuram, however, points to the existence of masonry temples even in his time. The pillars of his rock-cut temples are massive and are divided into three parts, the upper and lower being

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square in section and the middle octagonal (fig. 1, *a*). The bracket above it is cut away obliquely at 45 degrees or is rounded and often has a wavy ornament on either side of a smooth central band (fig. 2, *a*). The *chaitya*-window or *kūḍu* is simple, with a human head looking out and has a finial like a spade-head (fig. 3, *a*). The door-keepers (*dvārapāla*) on either side of the doorway of the sanctum are huge and hefty, carry a heavy club, are sometimes horned and have the sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*) running over the right arm; but they are not fierce-looking and have, unlike their later counterparts, only one pair of arms. Human sculpture, as seen in Mahendravarman's Gaṅgādhara panel at Tiruchchirappalli and in his caves at Tirukaḷukunram (District Chingleput), Maṇḍagapaṭṭu (District South Arcot), Kīlmāviḷaṅgai and Dalavānūr (District South Arcot) displays ample and well-rounded limbs, a somewhat elongated face, a double chin, a not too conspicuous nose and rather thick lips. The weapons are held by the deities in a realistic fashion. Below the waist-band, tied centrally like ribbon, are two or three heavy and broad loops. The *yajñopavīta* is shaped like ribbon with a fastening over the left breast.

Māmalla style.—In this period cave-temples continue, but free-standing monolithic temples also come into existence. The pillars are more slender and slightly more ornamented and are supported by squatting lions (fig. 1, *b*). The *kūḍu* is still simple and has the spade-head finial. The pavilion-ornament is like a thatched hut with a simulated railing below. The niche is decorated with a *torana*-arch on top, and the two *makaras* with

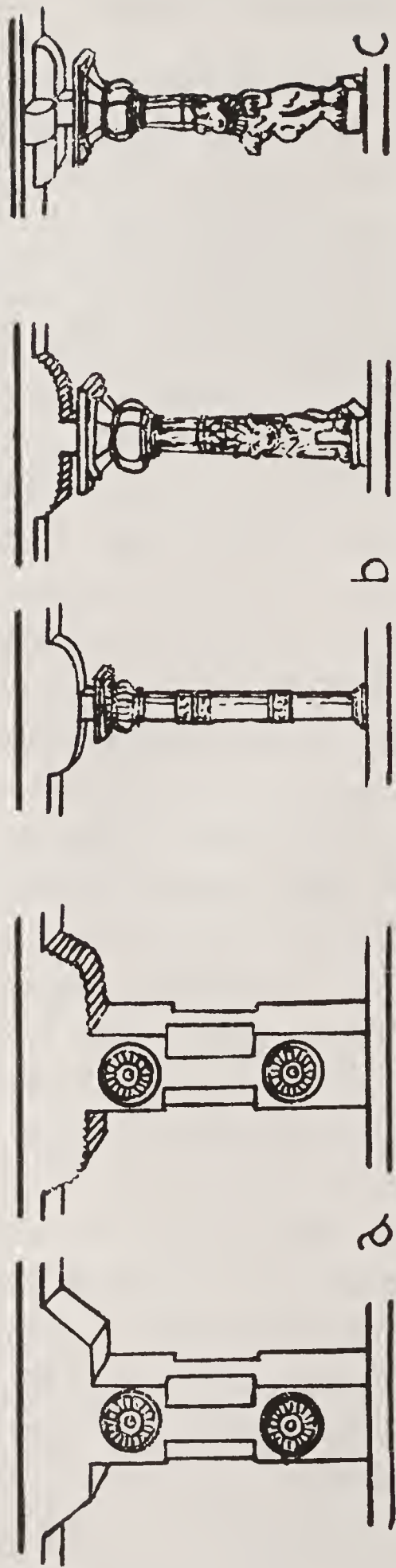


FIG. 1. *a*, pillar, Mahendra style—massive; *b*, pillar, Māmalla style—slender, ornamented and supported by squatting lion; *c*, pillar, Rājasiṃha style—slender, ornamented, supported by rearing lion

riders at either end of the *torana* have floriated tails. The *dvārapālas* are much the same as in the earlier caves. The figures, though still heavy, have a definitely slimmer contour. On the whole, the general features of the earlier period continue.

Rājasimha style.—In this period, the practice of excavating rock-cut temples falls into disuse. The pillars of the masonry-temples are slender and are supported not by squatting but by rampant lions (fig. 1, *c*). The *kūḍu* still has the spade-head finial but is now a little more ornamented. The niche appears with greater ornamentation. The *dvārapālas* are similarly more ornamented. The figures are conceived and executed with greater delicacy; and there is a greater exuberance and larger grouping of figures. Numerous small panels are also characteristic of this period. The central *vimāna* is given greater emphasis and is quite large compared with the tiny *gopura*—a new feature—which is no larger than the small cells arranged in a row all around. The forms of Gaṅgādharamūrti, Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti, Gajāntakamūrti and Dakṣiṇāmūrti predominate. A noteworthy

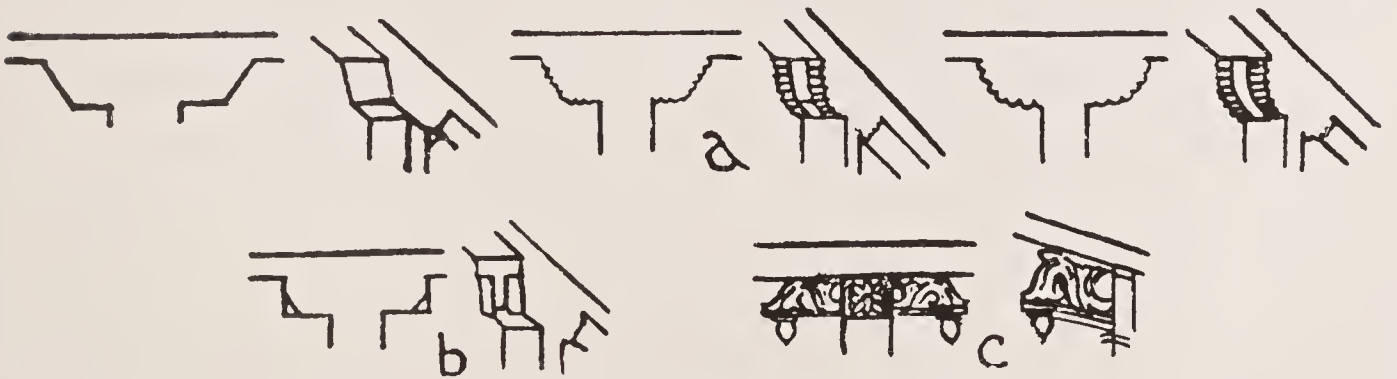


FIG. 2. *a*, capital, Mahendra, Māmalla and Rājasimha style, angular, rounded and fluted with or without central band; *b*, capital, Chola style (850-1250), angular with central projecting block, showing further development; *c*, capital, Vijayanagara style (1300 onwards), inverted lotus-bud design, showing still further development

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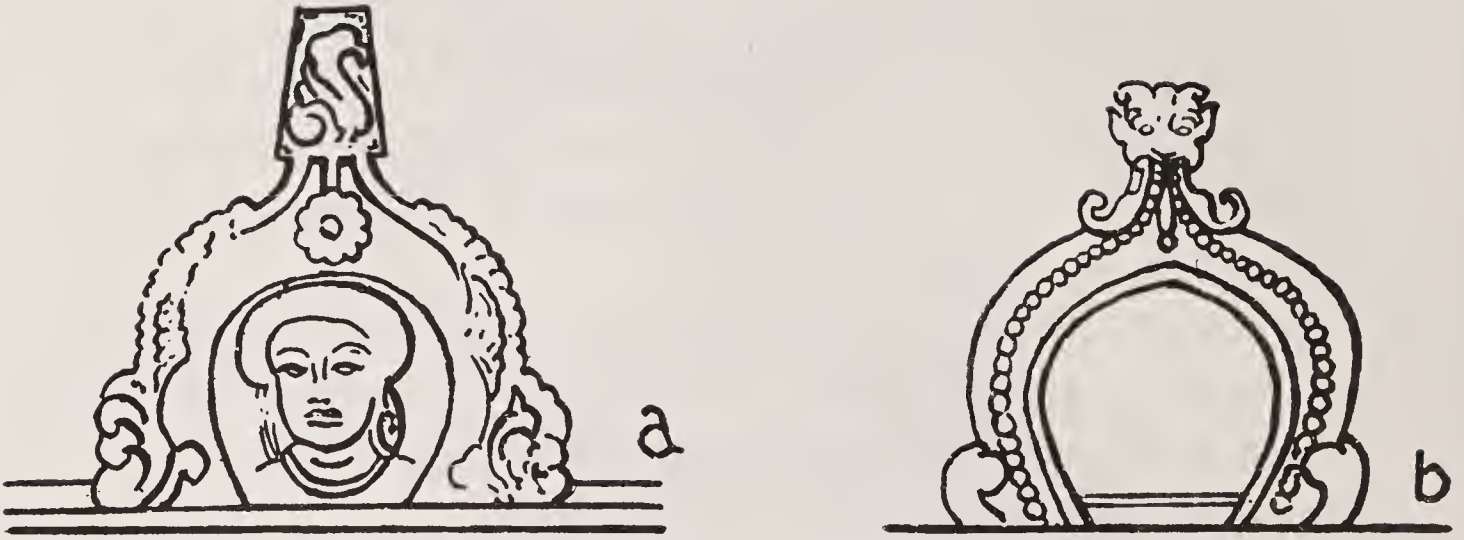


FIG. 3, *a*, *kūdu*, Mahendra style with shovel-head finial; *b*, *kūdu*, Vijayanagara style (1300 onwards), with lion-head finial, showing advanced stage of development

feature in all these Pallava temples at every stage is the representation of Somāskanda (Śiva with Umā and Skanda) behind the Śiva-*linga*, which is generally prismatic in Pallava temples.

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THE MONUMENTS AT MAHĀBALIPURAM CAN BE grouped as follows according to the mode of their construction:

- (i) *monoliths*, i.e., free-standing temples cut out of solid rock, most of which are locally styled *rathas* or chariots;
- (ii) *caves*, excavated in hill-scarps and used as temples, these being in some cases called *mandapas* or canopies;
- (iii) *temples*, the term being here used to denote built-up masonry-temples; and
- (iv) *sculptured scenes*, carved on the hill-edges. They illustrate all the styles of Pallava architecture and plastic art (above, pp. 5-9), though the majority belong to the period of Narasimha-varman I.

The visitor is advised to start with the group of the five monoliths in the extreme south, proceed to the north to see the monuments on and at the edge of the hill and finally proceed towards the sea for the Shore temple. If he has time at his disposal, he may as well include the monuments grouped together under 'Miscellaneous' (below, p. 32), some of which are far from the main group of monuments.

The Five Monoliths

This compact group is hewn out of solid rock to form five free-standing monolithic temples (pl. I). The

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temples, like many monuments all over the land, are associated, without any historical basis whatsoever, with the five Pāṇḍavas of the *Mahābhārata*. They were excavated during the reign of Narasimhavarman I and are the earliest monuments of their kind in India.

Note particularly the different types of superstructure which no doubt illustrate the varieties of contemporary roofing.

Monolith I (Dharmarāja-ratha).—The southernmost temple of the group is also the highest, revealing that the rock utilized for the purpose of making these temples sloped from south to north. The temple is a pyramidal structure with a square base; the upper part consists of a series of diminishing storeys, each having a row of pavilions above a row of *kūḍus* (*chaitya*-windows) arranged immediately above brackets of pilasters which divide the actual portion of the temple into niches with carved images. There are four corner-blocks, each with two panels containing standing figures, between which are two pillars and pilasters supported on squatting lions on all sides except one which has only four pillars. Among the eight sculptured panels on the four corner-blocks, one each represents Harihara, Brahmā and Skanda as Guru-mūrti; three show four-armed figures of Śiva, one of them with elaborate matted hair; and another portrays king Narasimhavarman himself, whose epithets *Śrī-Megha* and *Trailokya-var dhana-vidhi* are inscribed above the statue in Grantha characters of the time (pl. II A).

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The last image, at the back and facing east, is an Ardhanārīśvara, a combination of Śiva and Pārvatī (pl. II B). The perfect balancing of the masculine features and weapons of the Śiva-half and the graceful anatomical details and the sportive lotus in the half-figure of Pārvatī makes it a most delightful sculpture of the early Pallava age.

The images in the niches in the central tier bear features which become very frequent in later iconography. In the deeply carved central panel in the north, Śiva is represented as Gaṅgādhara, four-armed with a rosary in his upper right hand and with the adoring figure of Gaṅgā to his left. To the right of the central panel, Viṣṇu, carrying a wheel and a conch-shell in his upper pair of arms rests his lower left hand on Garuḍa, his vehicle, who stoops to support his weight. Beyond this is a panel showing a four-armed Śiva dancing on Apasmāra—one of the earliest representations of Naṭeśa in the Tamil area, where this form later on became very popular. Beyond this, towards the end, a four-armed Śiva, holding a drum and rosary in his upper pair of arms, is shown leaning on his bull in the form known as Vṛishabhāntikamūrti.

In the panel immediately to the left of the central one is perhaps a four-armed Śiva resting one of his hands on the shoulder of Arjuna, to whom he presented the Pāśupata weapon as a boon. Alternatively, it may be Chaṇḍeśvara. It is also possible that the panel represents Śiva resting one of his hands on the shoulder of Bharata to whom he enunciated the science of dance. In this case, what he is holding in his hand is a book and not a

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weapon or a garland. The next panel shows a four-armed Śiva in the company of a dancing attendant who is probably Taṇḍu or Bharata. The last panel is also a representation of four-armed Śiva as Viṇādhara-dakṣiṇāmūrti.

Among the corresponding panels on the south, the central one has a figure of standing Viṣṇu with four arms, carrying the wheel and the conch. The second panel to the right shows Kṛiṣṇa subduing the snake Kāliya represented with three hoods. In the corresponding panel to the left, a four-armed Śiva carrying a cobra, trident and axe is shown overcoming the demon Andhaka or probably Yama. Of the four panels which represent Śiva, one shows the form of Viṇādhara and the other of Nāṭya Dakṣiṇāmūrti with Bharata or Nandi in human form on whom he leans.

Among the three figures to the west, the one towards the southern end represents the delightful figure of a woman standing with a basket of flowers; the corresponding figure at the other end is that of Śiva as Kaṅkālamūrti, to the left of which is a door-keeper (*dvārapāla*). Here, corresponding to the one below, is a small portico with two pillars, one at either end. To the east adjoining the steps are four panels showing adoring ascetics.

In the east and north of the tier above is centrally shown a haloed male figure, probably Sūrya, wearing a crown with decoration resembling superimposed pots (*kaṇḍa-mukuta*) and cross-straps (*chhannavīra*), the right hand carrying a lotus-bud and the left resting just below the hip (*kaṭyavalambita*). To the south is Śiva

wearing a mass of matted hair (*jaṭābhāra*), all the figures being flanked by two devotees on either side. To the west is a deep cell in which there is a representation of four-armed Somāskanda Śiva seated at ease with his wife Umā and the baby Skanda and flanked by Brahmā and Viṣṇu.

There are *dvārapālas* guarding the doorway of the cell. The monkey and human-faced gargoyles arranged all round for the discharge of water from the roof are artistically carved.

Monolith II (Bhīma-ratha).—The next temple with a roof, shaped like the hood of a country-wagon, is elongated on a rectangular base and is supported lengthwise by four pillars and two pilasters. The other ornamentations, false *chaitya*-windows (*kūḍu*) and pavilion, are similar to that of the Dharmarāja-ratha. The curvilinear roof here and in the Draupadī-ratha is at once suggestive of its origin from the thatched hut with covering. The Bhīma-ratha contains no paddy-grass figure-carving.

Monolith III (Arjuna-ratha).—The next one, called Arjuna-ratha, is almost a replica of the Dharmarāja-ratha. There are carved panels between pilasters on the four sides of its main body on the ground floor and first storey. Three sides of the main body of the *ratha* contain five panels each, the central and corner ones being narrower but more prominent. In the corner-panels there are standing figures of *dvārapālas*. In the central panels are a Śiva leaning on Nandi on the south (pl. III) and Indra on Airāvata on the east and a Viṣṇu leaning on Garuda on the north. In the other panels

are *mithuna* figures or royal couples. One of the panels to the east shows a *rishi* carrying a staff followed by his disciple. The attempt of the sculptor to represent many of them in full and three-quarters profile shows a mastery of skill. Similar *mithunas* are also portrayed in the panels of the upper storey. Alternating elephants and lions are carved at the base of this monument all around as supports. The scheme of decoration by means of *kūḍus* and pavilions is the same as in the Dharmarāja-ratha.

To the west of the temple projects a portico supported by two pillars and two pilasters of the squatting lion type, of which the pillars are lost. A flight of steps, part of the monolith, leads up to the portico. Immediately above the capitals of the pillars and pilasters and below the *kūḍus* is a row of dwarfs (*gaṇas*) artistically portrayed in different funny postures. The corresponding row in the upper storey shows a frieze of geese. In the cell of this *ratha*, guarded by *dvārapālas*, there used to be a head crowned by *triśūla* similar to the one at the southern end of the wagon-roof of the Gaṇeśa-ratha (below, p. 24). This was obviously intended to represent Śiva. Though the horns are lost, they can be reconstructed after those in the Gaṇeśa-ratha. This is no longer shown in the cell.

Behind the *ratha* is a colossal monolithic couchant Nandi which, even in its semi-finished state, is a masterpiece.

Monolith IV (Draupadī-ratha).—The next temple, named after Draupadī, is probably the most elegant in this group. It is supported by four corner-pilasters and has a niche crowned by *makara-toraṇa* on three sides, while on the west it has two niches containing figures

of *dvārapālikās* which flank either side of the doorway decorated with *makara-toraṇa*. The remaining niches each contain a representation of standing Durgā, the one on the east resting on the severed head of the buffalo-demon. In the cell inside there is another four-armed standing Durgā, adored by two male worshippers kneeling at her feet, one of them brandishing his sword to cut off his head as an offering to the goddess, and four dwarf *gaṇas* flying overhead. In front of the *ratha* is a standing lion.

Monolith V (Nakula-Sahadeva-ratha).—The temple named after the twin heroes, Nakula and Sahadeva, is an apsidal one with ornamental features as in the Dharmarāja, Arjuna and other *rathas*. This extends slightly forward to form a porch supported by two lion-pillars. There are no figure-carvings on this temple. Close to this is a monolithic elephant suggesting the *gajapriṣthākāra* ('elephant-back') shape of the apsidal temple.

The Hill-area

Cave I (Varāha cave).—A little apart and behind the Mahishamardinī cave (below, p. 18) is the Varāha cave, the façade of which is almost completely hidden by an ugly modern building which is usually kept locked and thus prevents the visitor from having a look at the cave. The cave consists of a large hall with a front row of four pillars and two pilasters supported by squatting lions and a back row of two pillars (without lions) and a cell cut in the centre of the back wall. In this

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cell is a representation of Varāha raising the earth from the ocean. On the wall of the verandah on either side of the cell are four panels, respectively with a Gaja-Lakshmī seated on lotus and bathed by elephants and attended by nymphs, an eight-armed Mahishamardini towards the extreme end and two representations of Vishṇu, one beside each of these two. On the side walls of the verandah are again two panels, one showing a seated king with queens and the other a standing king leading his two queens. The panel of Gaja-Lakshmī is similar to that in the other Varāha cave (below, p. 25). Mahishamardini is represented standing on the cut head of the demon Mahisha. Vishṇu in both the panels is adored by two kneeling devotees at his feet and is flanked by *dvārapālas*, one of whom has snake-hoods above his head-gear suggesting Śesha, the lord of serpents, always associated with the Varāha incarnation of Vishṇu. Two other panels here represent Gaṅgādhara and Brahmā, the former receiving Gaṅgā on his locks, the strands of which he is supporting with his right upper arm. This reminds us of a similar representation in the Tiruchchirappalli cave.

In the interesting group of royal portraits one represents a king seated on a *simhāsana* flanked by his two standing queens (pl. IV A) and the other shows a king dressed in royal robes leading his senior queen followed by the second and pointing his right forefinger towards the image in the central shrine (pl. IV B). The two labels in Grantha characters of the seventh century at the top read *śrī-Simhaviṇṇa-potrādhirājan*

and *śrī-Mahendra-potrādhirājan*, meaning respectively, 'the glorious Adhirāja Simhaviṇṇapota (Simhavishṇu-pota)' and 'the glorious Adhirāja Mahendrapota', *pota*, *pottādhirāja*, *pottarāyan* being a family-title of the Pallava kings, connected with the Tamil *pottu* or Sanskrit *pallava*, 'sprout', from which the Pallava family took its name. These groups respectively represent Simhavishṇu (pl. IV A) and Mahendravarman I (pl. IV B). It may be recalled that there is a labelled representation of Narasimhavarman I in one of the corner-panels of the Dharmarāja-ratha (above, p. 11).

Temple I (Olakkanātha temple).—The name of the temple may probably be Olakkaṇṇīśvara (flame-eye) Śiva. But it is popularly known as *Olakkanātha* temple. On the summit of the rock containing the Mahishamardini cave is this masonry temple of Śiva which can be assigned to the time of Rājasimha (*circa* 690-715). Though the superstructure is lost, it must originally have resembled the Shore temple (below, p. 29). There are the usual rampant lions and panels representing Śiva in various attitudes. Of these the most remarkable ones are Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Śiva as a youthful ascetic meditating under a tree), Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti (Śiva showing mercy to Rāvaṇa, who attempted to shake Kailāsa, his mountain-abode) and Ālīḍhanṛittamūrti (Śiva dancing in the pose of a warrior in action).

Cave II (Mahishamardini cave).—A straight path about 200 m from the group of the Five Rathas leads to the Mahishamardini cave, a long hall with a triple cell. The façade of this cave shows four pillars and two pilasters. The pillars are polygonal with bulbous cushion.

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capital and square abacus. Pillars supported by squatting lions rise from the angles of a stylobate in the small *maṇḍapa* projecting from the central cell which is flanked by *dvārapālas*. The cornice of the *maṇḍapa* and of the entrance of the cell are decorated with friezes of geese. At either end of this large hall are two large panels, one representing Śeṣhaśāyī Viṣṇu (pl. V) and the other Mahishamardinī (pl. VI). The central cell is intended for a Śiva-*linga*, and on the wall behind is the usual representation of Somāskanda. In this case below Śiva is his vehicle Nandi.

Viṣṇu on his serpent-couch is represented in *yoga-nidrā* and the great calm in this figure is expressly heightened by the fury of Madhu and Kaiṭabha shown brandishing their weapons. The *āyudha-purushas* of Viṣṇu, including the beautiful youths Sudarśana (discus) and Nandaka (sword), the charming amazon Kaumodakī (club), the dwarfish Pāñchajanya (conch) are all shown first taking the permission of the Lord and then proceeding against the demons.

Mahishamardinī is shown eight-armed, riding her lion, equipped with all weapons and using the bow with its string pulled up to her ear. She is attended by hosts of *gaṇas* and amazon *yoginīs* and is in the war-like *ālīḍha* posture using a huge club. The umbrellas held over the vanquished and the victor are very suggestive. The contours of the Mahisha-demon have been powerfully delineated and the battle-scene is full of animation, the enthusiasm of the *gaṇas* and the dispirited attitude of the Asuras being delightfully contrasted. This is one of the most remarkable representations of Mahishamardinī



The Five Rathas (Monoliths). See p. 10

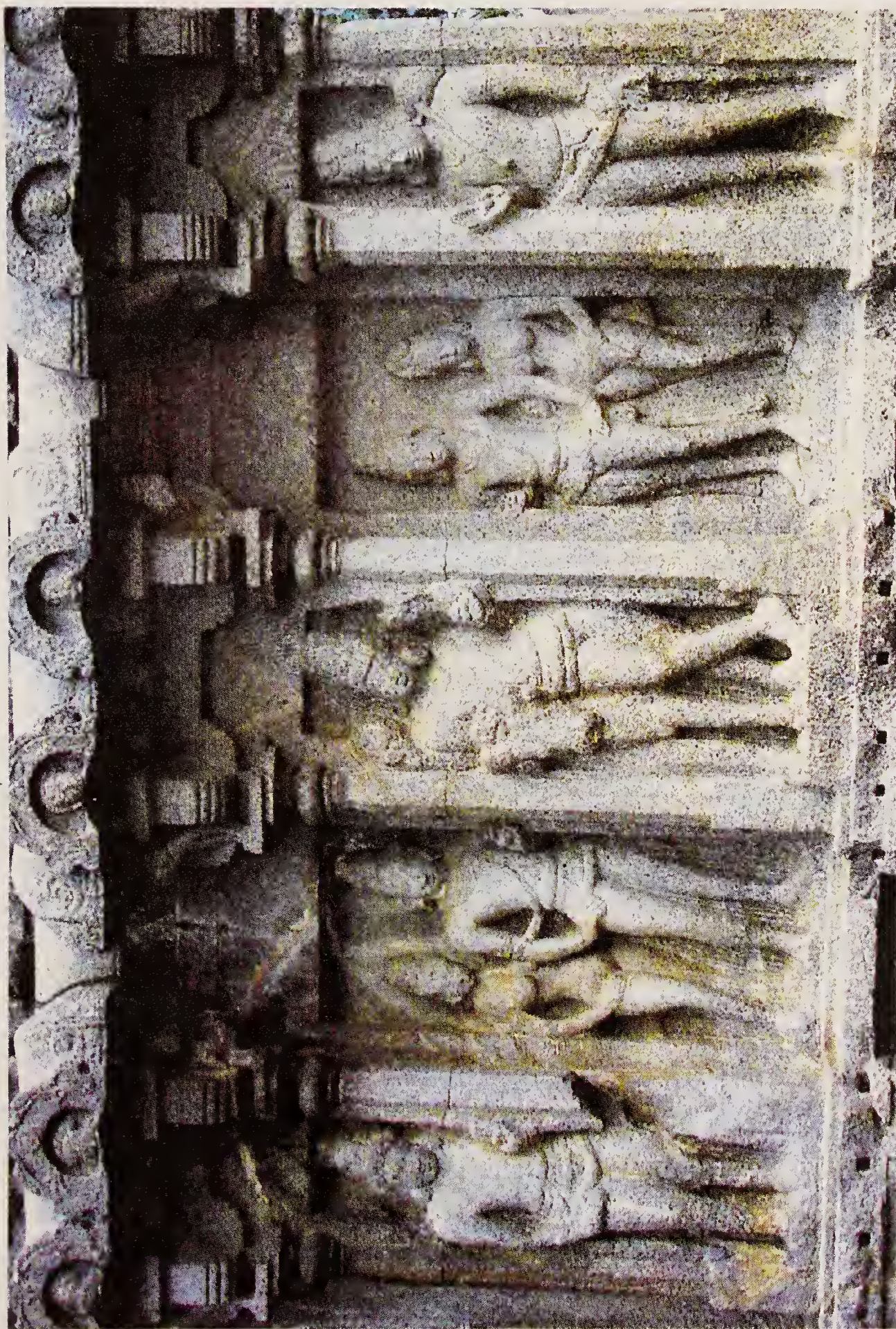
PLATE II



*A. Statue of Narasimhavarman in
Dharmarāja-rātha. See p. II*



*B. Ardhanārīśvara in Dharmarāja-
rātha. See p. 12*



Vrishabhāntika Śiva flanked by royal attendants in Arjuna-ratha. See p. 14

PLATE IV



A. Statue of Simhavishṇu with queens in Varāha cave I. See pp. 17-18



B. Statue of Mahendravarman with queens in Varāha cave I. See pp. 17-18



Śeṣhaśāyī Viṣṇu in Mahiṣamardini cave. See p. 19

PLATE VI



Mahishamardini in Mahishamardini cave. See p. 19



Arjuna's penance, part view. See p. 21

PLATE VIII



Varāha in Varāha cave II. See p. 25



Gaṇeśa-ratha. See p. 24

PLATE X



The Shore temple. See p. 29

in a group, of which we have another at Ellora. This, along with Śeṣhaśāyī Vishnu opposite, Varāha and Gaja-Lakshmī in the Varāha cave (below, p. 25) and Arjuna's penance (p. 21) are probably the best representations of plastic art at Mahābalipuram.

Cave III (Dharmarāja-maṇḍapa).—This cave-temple, typical of Mahendravarman's time, is triple-celled and has massive pillars. The *dvārapāla* (door-keeper) figures have been chipped and effaced by vandals.

Cave IV (Kṛishṇa-maṇḍapa).—This cave cut on the side of a boulder shows a remarkable scene from Kṛishṇa's life, viz., Kṛishṇa lifting mount Govardhana. Vandalism has not caused much damage, except for the later Vaishṇavite mark incised on the forehead of the couchant bull and the erection of a modern pillared hall which destroys the view of the original façade. The principal scene shows Kṛishṇa lifting Govardhana mountain to protect the cowherds and cowherdresses (*gopas* and *gopīs*) from the storm raised by Indra. Kṛishṇa is shown supporting the mountain on his left palm, the other hand being in boon-giving (*varada*) attitude. Close to him are *gopīs* standing and gazing at him in astonishment. Towards his right is Balarāma with his left hand resting on the shoulder of a *gopa* and the right on the hip. To his right is a charming scene of a cowherd milking the cow, the animal licking the calf in a very natural manner. Close by stands a *gopī* holding a pile of milk-pots in a rope-sling and balancing a bundle of fodder on her head; and beside her stands a wood-cutter with his axe idly resting on his shoulder. Behind the cow that is being milked is a little child in the arms of its mother, and

further up a cowherd playing a flute. All round there is a herd of cows even beyond Kṛishṇa to the left, where a little boy in naive curiosity stands in front of a woman with a pile of pots containing milk poised on her head, and an old man carries a baby on his shoulder; everything realistically depicts the unconcern of the cowherds at the fury of Indra, who, as the story goes, sent a storm to chastise the *gopīs* but could not injure them in any way, being protected by the mountain Govardhana held aloft by Kṛishṇa. The mountain itself contains at one end a group of lions, griffins and sphinxes in their lairs and a couchant bull at the other. This representation of the Govardhana scene is probably the best in India, even the one at Ellora coming nowhere near this. These griffins and sphinxes remind us of similar earlier representations at Amaravati and Sanchi and show the persistence of earlier tradition.

Cave V (Pañchapāṇḍava-maṇḍapa).—Beyond this is a large cave-temple known as Pañchapāṇḍava-maṇḍapa of which only six lion-pillars and similar pilasters at either end are finished. The brackets above the capitals of these pillars are decorated with lions and griffins with human riders.

Arjuna's penance (pl. VII).—This magnificent carving is unique in the range of Indian art. Two large boulders with a narrow fissure in between have been chosen to represent a series of rows of gods and goddesses like Chandra, Sūrya, pairs of Kinnaras and Siddhas, Gandharvas, Apsaras, etc., rushing towards a central point near the cleft where a sage stands on his left foot deeply engaged in penance involving physical mortification.

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To his right is a four-armed Śiva of majestic bearing carrying a trident in one of his hands and attended by dwarf *gaṇas*. Apart from the celestials there are hunters, sages, disciples and wild animals like the lion, tiger, elephant and boar. The group of elephants, so faithfully true to nature, are real masterpieces that enhance the charm of this wonderful carving. The young ones nestling in the space between the legs of the parent-animal and playing with trunks show delightful delineation of life. The cleft is occupied by gracefully-carved figures of Nāgas and Nāgīs with hands in adoration. In the vicinity is a temple of Viṣṇu where a number of sages are depicted in *yoga*-attitude in deep meditation, some with their legs fixed in *paryāṅka-granthi* or *yoga-paṭṭa* to ensure proper *yogic* posture. Below them are the disciples, one of them carrying water in a pot on his shoulder, another wringing out water from a wet cloth, a third engaged in *sūryopasthāna*, i.e., with the fingers of both hands bent to form a kind of telescope to look at the sun avoiding the fierce rays (as is usual after the *mādhyandina-sandhyā*), thereby indicating the position of the sun and the hour of the day. The vicinity of the hermitages of the sages is suggested by the presence of the deer fearlessly resting at ease near a lion. The radiation of peace and calm by the sages is reflected in a meditating cat, around which a number of rats are frolicking about. The portrayal of Nāgas, usually associated with water, in the cleft, the temple, the sages, the suggestion of their dwellings and the disciples performing rituals possible only near water—all these devices have been adopted by the sculptor to indicate that the

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cleft is intended to represent a river descending from the hills.

This scene is generally taken to represent a story from the *Mahābhārata* in which Arjuna, the epic-hero, performed penance to please Śiva and thus to obtain the Pāsupata weapon from him. This story was very popular about the time when the sculpture was executed. Bhāravi, a Sanskrit poet of the sixth century, adapted it for the theme of his *Kirātārjunīya*. This is also the theme that is carved on a pillar at Vijayawada containing an Eastern Chālukyan inscription of the tenth century and on the *gopuram* of the Br̥hadiśvara temple at Thanjavur (AD 1000). In the Mahābhalipuram sculpture, however, an important part of the story, viz., the fight between Arjuna and Śiva disguised as a hunter, is absent, and this has led some to doubt this identification of the sculpture. According to them, the representation here is that of Bhagīratha's penance and Śiva granting him the desired boon by agreeing to release Gaṅgā from his locks, the scene thus representing the descent of the river from the jungle-covered hills in the joyful and adoring presence of the gods.

A little away to the south of this, in front of the lighthouse, is another boulder on which there is an unfinished representation of a similar scene. The sculptor of the finished work might have experimented here before undertaking his main task.

Monkey-group.—Close by is a tiny but realistic carving of a group of monkeys, a family consisting of the father, mother and child. One of the parents is removing lice

from the head of the other, while the little one is resting on the lap.

Elephant-group.—A little beyond the Gaṇeśa-ratha towards the north is a small unfinished group of elephants, a peacock and a monkey. The elephants show a family composed of the parent animals and two little ones. The realistically-carved peacock and monkey are perched a little above.

Near the approach to this group is a perfectly balanced huge boulder resting on slender rock-base, popularly known as Kṛishṇa's butter-ball. Beyond this, three huge boulders, suggesting an open-air country oven, are called Bhīma's oven by the villagers.

Monolith VI (Gaṇeśa-ratha).—A path beyond the Monkey-group leads to the Gaṇeśa-ratha, one of the finest monolithic temples at Mahābalipuram (pl. IX). Though three-storeyed and of better workmanship, it resembles the Bhīma-ratha (above, p. 14) in roof-form. The gable-ends of the wagon-roof have a finial showing a human head decorated by trident-shaped head-gear, the side-prongs suggesting the usual horns in the *dvārapāla*-figures and the central one a long and narrow crown. This motif is repeated in the finials of the decorative gables along the wagon-roof. There is as usual the pavilion and *kūḍu*-ornamentation. The elaborately-worked roof has nine vase-shaped finials and is the precursor of the later *gopuram*, an essential adjunct of medieval south Indian temples. A row of pilasters decorates the sides and the back, while the opening is to the west. Between the *dvārapālas* at either end are two lion-pillars in the centre and two pilasters. The cell beyond the hall

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once contained a Śiva-*liṅga*, but it is now occupied by a figure of Gaṇeśa installed by villagers four or five decades ago.

Cave VI (Varāha cave II).—Close by to the southwest of the Gaṇeśa-ratha and behind Arjuna's penance is the cave known as Varāha-maṇḍapa, a fine specimen of its type. The hall at the front has two lion-pillars and two pilasters, and beyond this, in the centre, is the cell guarded by two *dvārapālas*. There are four panels representing Varāha raising the earth from the ocean wherein she was submerged (pl. VIII); Gaja-Lakshmī seated on lotus and bathed by elephants; Durgā with four arms; and Trivikrama overcoming the demon king Bali. A remarkable feature about the first panel is that the snout of the boar has been modelled with great care and the head of the animal has been handled with such dexterity that it blends in a natural way with the human contour of the rest of the figure in the panel. Among those surrounding and adoring Varāha are Sūrya, Brahmā, the *ṛishis* and a goddess who is Prithvī herself. The right foot of Varāha rests on the hoods of the Nāga king Śesha. The delineation of lotus-leaves and flowers and ripples suggests water.

In the Gaja-Lakshmī panel, Lakshmī is seated on the lotus wearing a peculiar type of crown met with in Pallava sculpture and *suvarṇavaikakshaka* (golden cross-garland on the torso) and hands in position to hold lotuses. The pond is suggested by the lotus-leaves below. The goddess is flanked by two nymphs on either side bringing pots filled with water for her bath which two elephants empty over her head. Here, as elsewhere

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in Mahābalipuram, the female figures appear apparently nude, but the student of early Indian sculpture will see that this is merely a suggestion of diaphanous apparel. The contours of the trunks of the elephants and the natural folds of their ears have been handled delicately.

Durgā is represented standing and with four arms, carrying the wheel and discus in the upper pair, the other two hands being in *abhaya* and *katyavalambita*. The parasol above signifies her universal sovereignty. On either side are a lion and an antelope. Śiva-*gaṇas* skip above and two devotees flank her at her feet, the one to her right cutting and offering his head.

In the Trivikrama panel Vishnu holds his bow, sword and shield in addition to his conch, discus and club. The celestial sphere is suggested above by the Sun and Moon. Bali and other subdued demons are shown at his feet. Brahmā adores the uplifted foot of Vishnu, and Jāmbavān beats a drum and rejoices over the event. The figure corresponding to Brahmā to the right of Trivikrama is probably Śiva. The figure falling in mid-air is probably of Triśaṅku, and this suggests that the foot of Viṣṇu reached the abode of the celestials beyond that of Triśaṅku, who is supposed to occupy the mid-air.

Rāyala-gopuram.—Beyond this, at the top of the boulder, is an unfinished *gopuram* or temple gate-tower of the Vijayanagara period showing the typical decoration on the jambs. This is the second unfinished Vijayanagara *gopuram* at Mahābalipuram, the other one being opposite the Talaśayana temple (below, p. 29).

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Cave VII (Rāmānuja-maṇḍapa).—Further north and facing east is a cave called the Rāmānuja-maṇḍapa. It is a triple-celled Śaivite cave completely ruined in later times by vandals who chiselled and destroyed the carved panels. The façade of the cave has two pillars and two pilasters supported by squatting lions.

The palace-site and lion-throne.—To the north-west of the lighthouse is a plateau where the royal palace was probably located, now marked by a heap of brick debris. The only noteworthy object here is a monolithic lion and a large rectangular seat with a beautifully carved couchant lion at one end. The modelling of the animal closely resembling the vehicle of the goddess in the Mahishamardini cave (above, p. 18), is exceedingly well-done. The lion is significantly portrayed as roaring, proclaiming, as it were, the sovereign power of the Pallavas. The back is made somewhat flat to serve as a seat.

Cave VIII (Koṭikāl-maṇḍapa).—To the west is a small primitive rock-cut cave-temple, devoted to Durgā. From the massive pillars and the general features of the temple, which closely resemble others of the Mahendra period, specially the one at Mahendravāḍi, it can be assigned to the time of Mahendravarman I. The façade shows two massive pillars and pilasters at either end. Beyond the hall to the front and cut in the centre of the back wall is a cell guarded by female door-keepers on either side of the entrance. There is an inscription *śrī-Vāmāṅkuśa* in letters of the middle of the seventh century on one of the pillars.

Cave IX (Koneri-maṇḍapa).—This is a crude unfinished

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cave-temple with four pillars supported by couchant lions and flanked by pilasters and with a central cell.

Cave X.—Close to this to the south-west is a five-celled rock-cut temple. Though the pillars here resemble the type usually met with in Mahendravarman's shrines, their greater finish and attenuated shape, the general form of their carving including *dvārapālas* and the advanced architectural features all point to the time of Narasimhavarman I as the date of the excavation of the cave. There is a front row of four pillars and two pilasters, each divided into three parts, the top and lower portions cubical in section and the middle one octagonal. There is a back row of four pillars similar in style to the pillars of the front row in the Mahishamardini cave, round in section but fluted and provided with bulbous cushion-capitals. The socket-holes in the floor of the five shrine-cells indicate that they were intended for Śiva-*lingas*. The row of *kūḍus* or *chaitya*-windows along the cornice with faces peeping through them and with shovel-headed finial and the row of geese below are typical of the early Pallava period.

Stone cistern ('Gopī's churn').—Opposite the temple is a large circular rock-cut cistern popularly known as Gopī's churn. On its rim is engraved *śrī-Kadhiti* in Pallava characters.

Cave IX (Trimūrti cave).—This is a triple-celled temple for the three gods of the Hindu pantheon, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. The front of each one of these cells is beautifully carved with all the usual decoration of a *gopuram*, and pilasters support the superstructure. The entrance of each cell is flanked by *dvārapālas* in narrow

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panels shown as usual in three-quarters profile. Towards one end beyond these is a niche surmounted by *makara-torana* for eight-armed Durgā standing on the cut head of the demon Mahisha. In the cells are represented Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, each attended by kneeling devotees and flying dwarf *gaṇas*, one of each on either side. Brahmā unusually has here a single face and wears a cross-garland of *rudrāksha* beads. He carries a rosary and water-vessel in his upper pair of arms, the other two being in *abhaya* and *katyavalambita* as in the other two deities. Śiva carries an axe and rosary and Viṣṇu a conch and discus. The word *malla* in letters of Nara-siṃhavarman's time in Brahmā's cell indicates the date of these carvings.

Temple II (Talaśayana-perumāḷ temple).—This temple, situated in front of Arjuna's penance, is a comparatively modern Viṣṇu temple dedicated to Talaśayana-perumāḷ. The carving and workmanship, though not very lavish, is typical of the Vijayanagara period (fifteenth-sixteenth century).

The Shore temple

A straight path opposite the Kṛishṇa-maṇḍapa adjoining Arjuna's penance (above, p. 21) leads to the sea. Close to the sea-shore, so close as almost to allow the spray of the waves to dash against the walls of the temple, is what is known as the Shore temple, an example of a masonry temple of Rājasimha's time (pl. X). The *vimāna* top here is somewhat narrow and elongated unlike that of the Kailāsanātha temple. The main

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shrine faces east and the entrance to it which is a small *gopuram* with walls in continuation on either side leads to the perambulatory passage (*pradakshināpatha*) between the temple and the outer wall. The entrance to the temple is approached by steps and beyond the porch (*mukha-maṇḍapa*) is the main cell which enshrines a broken fluted Śiva-*liṅga*. Opposite the *gopuram*, perched on a boulder and with the waves actually dashing on it every minute, is an emblem-column (*dhvaja-stambha*), an essential feature in all temples. As is usual in Pallava temples, the Somāskanda group is presented behind the Śiva-*liṅga*; it is also repeated on either side on the walls of the porch. There are, as usual, rampant lions at intervals dividing the carved panels of the outer walls of the temple, of which many are almost obliterated by the destructive agency of continuous spray of sea-water. Behind this shrine but connected with it and provided with a small porch is a cell without superstructure wherein is enshrined a figure of Śeṣhaśāyī Viṣṇu. Adjoining this and facing west is a shrine similar to but smaller than the main one, also devoted to Śiva. The Somāskanda panel is as usual on the back wall inside. In the porch on either side there are *dvārapālas*.

Opposite this temple, at some distance, is a *balipīṭha* and the pedestal of a *dhvaja-stambha*, round which have been stacked some loose sculptures, one of these being a striking representation of seated Śiva as Tripurāntaka with Viṣṇu as his arrow and another of Dakṣiṇāmūrti on the four sides of a cylindrical pillar. Here an expansive courtyard is partly surrounded by an unfinished enclosure, along which are arranged rows of Nandis. The

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remains of the entrance to the courtyard to the west are also visible. Near the entrance to the west there are panels probably dealing with scenes from the history of the Pallavas, as in the Vaikuṇṭha-perumāḷ temple at Kanchipuram. Among the iconographic carvings there are those of Śiva, one of which, representing Tripurāntaka with Vishnu as his arrow, is interesting.

On the outer walls are a few Chola inscriptions in Tamil referring to Jalaśayana *alias* Kshatriyasimha-pallaveśvara, Paḷligoṇḍaruḷiyadeva and Rājasimha-pallaveśvara. Paḷligoṇḍaruḷiyadeva refers to the image of Śeṣhaśāyī Viṣṇu in the cell between the two shrines, the word meaning 'the god who was pleased to go to sleep'. The Śiva shrine facing west should be the Rājasimha-pallaveśvara temple. Hence Kshatriyasimha-pallaveśvara shrine can be no other than the one facing east, Kshatriyasimha being a surname of Narasimhavarman II. In the courtyard was found a damaged inscription on the sides of the *bali-pīṭha* opposite the shrine facing west, consisting of six Sanskrit verses praising the qualities, beauty, valour and piety of Rājasimha, i.e., Narasimhavarman II. One of these verses is identical with the last verse of the long inscription in the Kailāsanātha temple at Kanchipuram.

Near the enclosure and in the vicinity of the shrine facing west is a large sculpture of Durgā's lion, with the goddess seated on the right hind leg of the animal. On its chest is cut a small square niche wherein also is a representation of Durgā. At the foot of the pedestal on which the lion is seated is a headless but skilfully executed couchant deer.

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The whole compound of the Shore temple was buried under a thick deposit of sand till a few years back. This has been cleared, but the extreme nearness of sea is a perpetual menace to the safety of the temple. The salt-laden winds from the sea are eating into the vitals of the fabric and, supplemented by rain, causing erosion of the sculpture. The temple has, however, recently (1944-45) been effectively protected from the direct beating of the sea-waves and spray by the erection of a semi-circular groyne-wall.

Miscellaneous

Mashihāsura rock.—A little to the north of the Shore temple is a large piece of rock almost touching the sea with a shrine of Durgā cut into it. On the back wall of the shrine is an eight-armed figure of Durgā. The doorway is flanked by lion-pilasters and female door-keepers. On the farther side of the rock is carved Durgā's lion attacking Mahishāsura.

Carved rocks.—To the south of the Shore temple and not far from it are some carved rocks, one of which has a niche and another has been fashioned into the form of a rampant lion and a niche containing Durgā. A rock opposite this shrine has been shaped like a recumbent lion, and the back of the rock with the Durgā shrine has another similar shrine, facing east, dedicated to Indra, whose identity is suggested by the head of an elephant carved below the niche. At one end of the rock is a carving of a trotting horse as also of some worshippers, all of which are weather-worn.

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Tiger-cave.—About 4·8 km north of Mahābalipuram, in the hamlet known as Śāḷuvaṅkuppam, there is what is known as the Tiger-cave. It is a rock-cut shrine of Durgā approached by a flight of steps, has a small portico in front and is flanked by two pilasters supported by rampant lions. All around the cells are large lion-heads. Towards the left end two other cells have elephant-heads carved beneath each. Judging from the general features of the carvings and the peculiar nature of the rampant lions the shrine may be assigned to the time of Rājasimha.

Cave XII (Atiraṇachaṇḍa cave).—This shrine has intriguing features. While the massive pillars, simple corbel-capitals and the *dvārapālas* indicate its early date, the fluted Śiva-*linga* inside and the Somāskanda carved on the back wall inside are late characteristics. A number of inscriptions here mention that king Atiraṇachaṇḍa dedicated the shrine to Śiva named after himself *Atiraṇachaṇḍeśvara*. The word Atiraṇachaṇḍa was probably one of the many surnames of Rājasimha, to whose time may be assigned the other late features of the cave.

Monolith VII (Vaḷayankuṭṭai-ratha).—Near the Buckingham Canal are three *rathas* smaller in size than the Five Monoliths (above, p. 10). One of them, called the Vaḷayankuṭṭai-ratha, is a shrine facing east and, though roughly finished, resembles the Arjuna-ratha.

Monoliths VIII and IX (Piḍāri-rathas).—Close to Vaḷayankuṭṭai-ratha are two unfinished rock-cut shrines.

Saptamātrikās and miscellaneous sculptures and the temple of Mukunda.—If the visitor has some extra time at his disposal, he may examine a group of Pallava images

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representing the Saptamātrikās at the northern end of the hamlet adjoining Mahābalipuram and a few more sculptures, mostly broken, housed in the bungalow belonging to the zamindar, of which an Ālīḍhanṛittamūrti and a Viṣṇu of Pallava workmanship are noteworthy.

Still further up, there is a Viṣṇu temple of the Rājasiṃha period, known as the Mukunda temple which is typical architecturally of the period and is not very much embellished with sculptural detail.

Recent Excavations

The excavation adjoining northern *prākāra* of the Shore Temple brought to light an ovalish pond-like stepped-structure. Over the chiselled basal outcrop of the structure, were noticed a monolithic sculpture of Bhuvarāha abutting the southern apse, and to its north a miniature shrine with *adhiṣṭhāna* carved in the bedrock sporting circular superstructure. The magistic Bhuvarāha, carved realistically over a platform, bears an inscription consisting the *virudas-Śrirājasimhaḥ*, *Śriranajayaḥ*, *Śribharaḥ*, and *Śrichitra-kārmukha* attributed to Narasiṃhavarman II Rājasiṃha (AD 700-727).

The miniature shrine is dedicated to Vṛishabhāntika-Śiva. It bears architectural features of Pallava period with a unique *rudrachchhandā-śikhara*. Further excavations at the site brought to light flight of steps leading to *mahadvara* and bathing *ghāt*-like structure running north-to-south almost parallel to the sea line.

The exposed structures were conserved by resetting the ashlar masonry and burnt-bricks, besides consolidating damaged image of Bhuvarāha and architectural components of miniature shrine.

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SITE PLAN, MAHABALIPURAM, DISTRICT CHINGLEPUT (TAMILNADU)

